

Environmental Assessment

Title: Lower Burnt Ranch Vault Toilet

EA Number: OR-054-03-101

Location: Township 9 South, Range 20 East, Section 32, SW 1/4, NW 1/4

Date of Preparation: September 29, 2003

Name and Location of Preparing Office: Central Oregon Resource Area, Prineville, Oregon.

Conformance and Consistency: The proposed action is consistent with the following land use plans: Two Rivers RMP, June 1986, and the John Day River Management Plan, February 2001.

Purpose and Need: Lower Burnt Ranch Recreation Site, otherwise known as Juniper Canyon Launch, is a gravel boat launch developed by BLM located at river mile 131.5 along the John Day River in Wheeler County. The site is located approximately 21 road miles northwest of Mitchell, Oregon and is accessed from Burnt Ranch County Road or by boat from upstream launch points. Current development of the site includes a .5 mile gravel access road which descends from the county road to a bench above the river. The access road travels downstream along the river bench, passing several primitive campsites, ending at a gravel turn around, a gravel launch ramp and a BLM bulletin board.

Visitors are attracted to the site for primitive camping, fishing, hunting and boat launching. The boat launch was constructed in 2002, in accordance with the 2001 John Day River Management Plan, to allow drive-in boat launching and landing to be shifted away from Burnt Ranch sandy beach, located approximately one mile upstream. To protect the unique beach environment, the upstream site is being converted to non-motorized access only.

The new recreation site has been discovered by recreationists and is rapidly increasing in popularity. Toilet facilities are needed as evidenced by toilet paper deposited behind vegetation both along the river and the immediate uplands. The lack of toilet facilities and increased public use has resulted in a human waste problem which detracts from the visual quality of the site and creates a possible threat to public health and water resources.

Lower Burnt Ranch Recreation Site is located within the John Day Wild and Scenic River corridor in a reach classified as a Recreational River. The recreation site is also located within the John Day State Scenic Waterway in a reach classified as a Scenic River Area.

Soils at the site appear to be loamy sands as a result of riverine deposition. Vegetation consists primarily of sagebrush, juniper, grasses and invasive weed species. The adjacent riparian zone provides habitat for beaver, mink, muskrat, waterfowl, raptors and non-game birds, and occasional mule deer.

Description of the Proposed Action: The proposed action is to install a permanent vault toilet at Lower Burnt Ranch Recreation Site. The pre-fabricated vault toilet, constructed by CXT - Environmental Concrete Products, would be wheelchair accessible, blend in color with the natural surroundings, and have a 1000 gallon underground vault with an ABS plastic liner (see attached product data). The toilet would be located on the bench above the river, on the south or upland side of the access road, mid-way between the boat ramp and the primitive camping area. The site is located outside the 50-year floodplain, and well above the mean high water mark. A hole would be dug in the ground to accommodate the vault which would extend four feet below ground level. Foot and wheelchair access would be provided via a short path from the access road to the toilet. The toilet would not be visible from the river due to natural screening provided by topography. The exterior color of the toilet would blend in with the natural surroundings.

Alternatives: No action is the only other alternative considered.

Environmental Impacts		Affected		Affected	
Critical Elements	Yes	No	Critical Element	Yes	No
Air Quality		X	T & E Plants		X
ACEC's		X	Tribal Concerns & Treaty Rights		X
Cultural Resources		X	Wastes, Hazardous/Solid		X
Environmental Justice		X	Water Quality, Drinking/Ground		X
Farmlands, Prime/Unique		X	Wetlands/Riparian Zones		X
Floodplains		X	Wild & Scenic Rivers		X
T & E Animals		X	Wilderness		X
T & E Fish		X			

Description of Impacts: Installation of a vault toilet at Lower Burnt Ranch Recreation Site would provide facilities to support existing recreation use and reduce the problem of human waste deposition in the surrounding vegetation. The installation of restroom facilities would likely contribute to additional use of the site over time. An increase in use was expected to occur when shifting use to this new site and away from the Burnt Ranch beach site located upstream.

This portion of the John Day Wild and Scenic River is classified as a Recreational River, which allows for the development of recreational facilities (BLM Manual 8351.5C). Installation of a vault toilet within a State Scenic Waterway requires the approval of the Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission, a process which is currently underway.

The vault toilet would be located above the mean high water mark, well outside the 50 year floodplain. Extreme high water in the John Day River, exceeding flow levels on record, could cause river water to seep into the top of the vault from around the base of the toilet. Should this occur, the contents of the vault would continue to be sealed inside the vault, and no leakage would be expected.

The location of the toilet would be outside of the riparian zone. Soils at the site appear to be loamy sands as a result of riverine deposition. Installation of the toilet would cause

soil disturbance in an area approximately thirteen feet by seven feet by four feet deep, when a hole is dug to accommodate the cement vault.

The installation of a vault toilet would not affect water resources in the area as the vault is constructed of concrete and is fully lined with an impermeable plastic liner which would prevent groundwater contamination.

Impacts of No Action: Under the no action alternative, human waste and toilet paper scattered throughout the vegetation, would continue to detract from the scenic quality of the site, and high water flows could wash this waste into the river creating a minor localized contribution of non-point-source pollution, and a slight potential for cumulative impacts.

Cumulative and Residual Impacts: Residual impacts of the proposed action would include increased recreational use, as noted in the environmental consequences.

Description of Mitigation: All mitigations have been incorporated into the proposed action.

Persons/Agencies Consulted: Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission

Preparer: _____ Date : _____

Environmental Coordinator: _____ Date : _____